

This Issue [Editorial to special issue “New visions of mentoring”]

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AS WE ANTICIPATE LIFE in the 21st century, it becomes clear that we will need to invent new approaches to teaching that require a reexamination of what we know about mentoring. Much of what we as educators know about mentorship has been derived from timeworn models: guild systems, apprenticeships, and other systems of socialization. Yet the growing importance of mentorship in various areas of educational enterprise calls for new thinking about these educational structures and relationships. We need new ways to conceptualize healthy and viable approaches to mentoring practices in our professional arenas. This collection of articles explores a variety of such approaches.

The importance of mentorship is underscored by its ubiquity in both historical and functional terms. For well over 2 millennia, mentors have been with us, guiding, encouraging, and supporting novices on the path to professional development and improvement. Even so, the changes of the past 2 decades in how we work and learn have brought about an unprecedented interest in the practice and study of mentorship.

In today’s rapidly developing culture of technology, mentorship is a way to help workers quickly absorb new job skills. Mentorship is also serving as an adjunct to traditional professional training, and this has important implications for teacher preparation. For example, many institutions responsible for teacher preparation are experimenting with new ways to deliver preprofessional and inservice training through the use of instructional technology, field-based training activities, and formal mentoring programs.

Over a decade ago, an issue of *Theory Into Practice* (Zimpher, 1988) dealt with viewpoints of teachers about their roles and responsibilities as mentors for other teachers. For many decades, veteran teachers in schools have mentored new inservice teachers; they have shared professional knowledge and expertise with their new colleagues. More recently, instructors in teacher preparation programs have begun to examine their own role as mentors. Today’s educators envisage mentorship in ways that will undoubtedly yield significant departures from traditional mentoring practices.

The contributors to this issue offer alternative views of mentorship in teacher education programs, schools, and academe that are intended to empower individuals and groups. This issue continues the discussion of teacher-as-mentor that began a decade earlier but also considers other expressions of mentorship in education that have recently emerged.

The quest for alternatives to traditional mentoring has been driven, in part, by the changing culture of the field of education. The particular needs of culturally diverse students require new levels of sensitivity and support. Preservice teacher development is now more complex than it was 10 years ago because of the growing emphasis on establishing and nurturing partnerships between schools and higher learning institutions. In response to these social changes, an emerging body of literature poses alternatives to orthodox mentoring structures—structures that, in many cases, promote unidirectional, top-down hierarchies.

Mentoring has a shadow side that needs to be monitored to ensure that fairness and justice are built into relationships of institutional inequity or power imbalance. Ideas of reciprocal teaching and learning and the call for mutual trust between mentors and protégés beckon us to think creatively about mentorship. Practices

involving mutual learning or collaborative mentorship challenge the conventional view of “other” as the subject, the learner, or the ignorant.

Some of the concepts that have contributed to recent creative experimentation in the area of mentorship include guided practice, peer coaching, community of learners, co-mentoring, team-building, and collaborative inquiry. These ideas share a common thread—the principle that mentoring relationships should strike a balance between guidance and autonomy. This is a view of mentorship that is neither authoritarian nor, at the other extreme, one in which protégés are left to their own devices. Rather, these concepts suggest that a healthy and viable mentoring arrangement is one of shared learning, responsibility, and authority. The mentoring structure becomes a mosaic in which each person participates as a co-learner in development toward a common goal or vision.

Another thread shared by many of these new ideas about mentoring theory and practice is an emphasis on the interpersonal experience of mentoring. This reflects a shift in research focus away from the external features of mentorships, such as their structures and arrangements, which have characterized much of the past thinking and writing on mentoring. Inquiry into the internal components of mentoring—the actual process of mentoring socialization and its challenges, risks, and rewards—is relatively new. The literature on such topics began to emerge only in the 1980s.

An important aim of this issue is to expand the body of literature on mentorship to reflect the most recent thinking on what mentorship means in a variety of contexts and to suggest where future research in this area is heading. We present a diverse set of perspectives that cut across cultural contexts, subject areas, educational levels, and learning experiences. The authors offer several types of mentorship in the areas of personal and collaborative growth, interpersonal relationship, art education, institutional and cultural critique, teacher education/development, the teaching profession, organizational culture and change, and partnership support teams and communities. Contributors share reflections situated within university and school settings as well as within school-university collaboratives.

While the articles each take a unique stance toward mentoring, they are linked by a desire to explore beyond the traditional canon of mentorship and achieve a revitalized knowledge of its potential to improve and transform professional cultures. We do not propose a unified theory of mentoring or policy reform based on new mentoring practices. Instead, the writers each pursue mentoring as a reflection of their own understanding, work, and context. We invite our readers to join this conversation about the potential of mentorship to create expanded spaces of professional learning and connection.

Reference

Zimpher, N.L. (Ed.). (1988). Mentoring teachers [Theme issue]. *Theory Into Practice*, 27(3).